

Reading to Learn Series

ANCIENT STORIES

RETOLD BY
SWAPNA DUTTA

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a
1 [SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC] and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political,

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship,

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity,
and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the 2 [unity and integrity of
the Nation],

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty sixth day of November, 1949, do
HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION

- 1 Subs. by the Constitution (Forty second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec 2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic"
(w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
- 2 Subs. by the Constitution (Forty second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec 2, for "Unity of the Nation"
(w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

Part IV A Fundamental Duties

ARTICLE 51A

Fundamental Duties – It shall be the duty of every citizen of India—

- (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem
- (b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom,
- (c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India,
- (d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so,
- (e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities, to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women,
- (f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture,
- (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wild life and to have compassion for living creatures,
- (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform,
to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
- (i) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement

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राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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Foreword

THE Reading to Learn Project of the NCERT is an open invitation to children of various age-groups to read books for pleasure and knowledge. Books brought out under this Project are specially designed to make young readers improve their reading skills and become better familiar with the world around them. The themes selected are such as will whet their curiosity and give them the gift of an enquiring mind and spirit.

Under this Project, a series of books in English and Hindi have already been brought out. The present book 'Ancient Stories Retold' by Smt Swapna Dutta is a useful addition to the package. It contains 10 stories some of which deal with basic human values such as sympathy, kindness, cooperation, and a humane and caring attitude towards one's fellow beings as well as animals. It is hoped that this book will inspire children to take greater interest in socio-cultural and natural environment. I am grateful to the author for having prepared the book with care and concern. I am also grateful to my colleague, Shri Nasiruddin Khan, Reader in English, DESSH for taking care of the manuscript at various stages of its finalization and publication.

Dr. A.K. SHARMA

Director

National Council of Educational
Research and Training



GANDHIJ'S TALISMAN

"I will give you a talisman Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test .

Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him Will he gain anything by it ? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny ? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions ?

Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away."

M.K. Gandhi

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Acknowledgements

Seven Stories, namely 'The Prince and the Shepherd', 'Two Sisters', 'Ramdhan's Luck', 'The Wheel of Destiny', 'The Magic Chant', 'The King and the Goldsmith' and 'The Rival Kings' were published in the Children's World, New Delhi during the period 1975-1988 'The Seventh Queen' first appeared in the Target, New Delhi The author is grateful to the editors of these magazines for permission to use the stories again

SWAPNA DUTTA

•

The Value of Tears

IT was the month of spring. Flowers bloomed every where— red, blue, yellow, orange and white. Birds sang. And the brooks sang too. Everyone was happy. Everybody smiled.

Queen Madhurima woke up one such morning. She looked out of her window. She saw the flaming maze of colours in the garden. She heard the soft notes of the Koel. Her heart filled with joy "May we go into the woods to celebrate the Spring Festival, my Lord?" She asked the king, her husband. He smiled and nodded.

So, Queen Madhurima went to the woods with her mates. They bathed in the crystal pool. They picked flowers and made garlands. They chased butterflies and sang with the birds. Everyone was happy.

Little by little, daylight faded. The birds flew back to their nests. The lotuses closed. The lilies drooped in slumber. The stars opened their twinkling eyes. Queen Madhurima returned to her palace with slow, reluctant steps.

She awaited the king, eager to tell him all about her perfect day in the woods. But he did not come. Seconds turned to minutes and minutes to hours. The moon shone bright. The roads grew quiet. And still the king was not there. The queen's impatience turned to anger. When the king stood at her door at last, it was nearly midnight.

"What made you so late, my Lord?" She asked angrily.

"The sorrows of the people," answered the king.



"What made you so late, my Lord?"
She asked angrily...

“Sorrow?”

“Yes, their problems and difficulties. Who else can help them but the king?”

Queen Madhurima tossed her pretty head back “What a shame to waste such a beautiful day hearing complaints!” The king smiled but said nothing. The same thing happened the next day. And the day after. Finally, the queen spoke to the king impatiently.

“Why is your kingdom so different from the woods?” She asked, “Here we have nothing but sighs and tears, sorrows and problems. I am sick of it all. I want to be happy. I want nothing but smiles and laughter.”

“But that is not possible, Madhurima,” the king said gently “Life is made of both light and darkness, joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. We have to face both. It is just not possible to shut one out.”

Queen Madhurima shook her head obstinately. “Everything is possible, my Lord. You must proclaim that whosoever sheds a drop of tear shall be banished for ever.”

The king looked at her, amazed and hurt. “You are the queen and mother of the people. How can you wish for anything so unkind and unreasonable?”

I do wish it, and it’s a vow,” she said

“So be it,” said the king. “But you shall regret it before long.” Queen Madhurima laughed and turned to the mirror.

The proclamation was made far and wide. People heard it in mute astonishment. What heartless wretch was robbing the poor of their one consoler, tears? How could they smile and laugh in the face of grief, loss, pain and sorrow? Can happiness be forced? The number of the banished people increased by leaps and bounds.

Seasons tripped by. The year turned round. It was spring once again. The woods were ablaze with colour and fragrance.



“Have you learnt the value of tears, Madhurima ?”

The birds sang all day. But Queen Madhurima had no time for anything. Her little son, the prince, lay seriously ill. Her heart was as heavy as lead. Doctors from all over the world came. It was of no use. When the sun rose the next morning the little prince was dead. Queen Madhurima cried and cried. It seemed as though she would never smile again.

The next morning the king sent for her in his open court.

"You have broken your own command, Madhurima," he said in a clear voice. "You must now face banishment."

The queen looked at him in amazement. "But how can the queen be banished?" she asked.

"I made the law at your command and a law once made spares none. Not even royalty."

Queen Madhurima was shown out of the royal gates into the deep forest beyond. Tears blinded her as she stumbled along, expecting to be attacked by wild animals. Then she heard voices. All the banished people were there in the forest. They welcomed the queen. They built a shelter for her as well.

Days flew by. The people respected the banished queen and loved her with all their hearts. To her they spoke of their joys and sorrows. With her they shared their smiles and tears. Queen Madhurima forgot her pride and her arrogant ways. She served and toiled, aided and nursed the people who had given her a new life. At last she was their true queen and mother.

One bright morning, the king appeared in his golden chariot. Looking around, he saw Queen Madhurima nursing a sick child. The child clung to her arms. There were tears in her eyes. The king looked at her. She bowed her head.

"Have you learnt the value of tears, Madhurima?" he asked.

"I have, my Lord," she answered softly.

"Then come back to your kingdom with all your banished subjects," said the king.

The Red Parrot

PRINCESS Rupanjali was indeed a very beautiful woman. Her smile held the colours of the rainbow. Her teeth were like pearls. When she walked, roses seemed to bloom beneath her feet. When she sang, the birds sang too. Her voice was like the song of the cuckoo. Her laughter was like the babbling brook. She dazzled every eye. "A vision of beauty, that's what she is", said the people of the land.

The king, her father, looked at her and grew pensive. Where would he find a prince good enough for her? The queen looked at her and sighed. To whom would she entrust this precious gem? Princess Rupanjali, unaware of their anxiety, laughed and sang and grew prettier and prettier each day. Her friends and playmates adored her. The most devoted and loyal among them was Nilanjana. She was a simple peasant girl, gentle, kind and sincere. She thought the world of the princess who was lovelier than loveliness itself.

But beauty is not the only thing in life. Nor is it the most important one. Princess Rupanjali, in spite of her ravishing looks, was an extremely proud and unkind girl. She would tolerate nothing ugly or old. Nor could she bear to be scolded, criticized or denied a single wish. She ruled her little world with a firm hand, getting her own way in everything.

One morning a strange thing happened. The king was in his court listening to the problems of the people when the entire hall was filled with the most exquisite music they had ever heard. Every one turned around to see a stranger playing on a harp. His white robe shone like the moonbeams. There was a garland of jasmine flowers around his neck. His harp was snow-white too.

"I have come from the land of Rainbows", he said in a voice as sweet as his harp.

"And why have you come?" the king asked.

"I have been sent by the Rainbow Prince who is the best looking prince on earth. We have been looking for a bride good enough for him. He has heard of princess Rupanjali and has sent me as his messenger to convey his proposal."

The king got up from his throne and clasped the hands of the messenger. "My heartiest welcome to you", he said. "I cannot tell you how happy I am to hear of my daughter's good fortune." The messenger smiled and said, "But there is an important thing I have not told you as yet. A wicked old witch, who came to our land in disguise, has put the Rainbow Prince to sleep. She has breathed the consciousness of the prince into a blood-red parrot which has flown away. He will not awake until the bird is found."

The news spread throughout the land. It reached the ears of the soldiers, the farmers, the workers and the people at large. It reached the ears of the queen, resting in her chamber. It reached the ears of princess Rupanjali, seated in her garden among her friends. She left her bower in a hurry and went to the king.

"I must have the red parrot, Father", she said in a determined voice. The king looked at her with amused eyes "But how can you, child? We do not know where it has flown. It seems an impossible task to me "

Princess Rupanjali stamped her foot impatiently "I don't want excuses. I must have the bird! I am not going to marry anyone but the Rainbow Prince "

The king looked at her in despair. He knew that she would stick to her words. But how was the bird to be found? Rupanjali looked at his worried face and said "Let every single bird in the kingdom be caught. The red parrot is bound to be among them "

There was a faint murmur in the court. It seemed such an unkind thing to do. But the princess was firm "Whoever lets go a single bird will die", she said and left the court. The king endorsed her words half-heartedly. He knew that princess Rupanjali would give no one any peace until this was done.

The trapping began the very next day. The whole land was over-crowded with various kinds of nets and traps. Not a bird sang amongst the trees, and none flew across the sky. The nests were all deserted. The very atmosphere seemed arid and scary without the birds. The trappers had done their job well.

All the birds were shut in a special wing of the prison. There were millions of them. There were red birds and blue birds, green birds and black birds. There were big birds and small birds, birds dotted, striped and of every shade and hue. How they cried at being caught like this! The entire prison resounded with their heart-rending, frightened shrieks.

Nilanjana heard them with tears in her eyes. Her heart went out to the poor birds. She decided to go to Princess Rupanjali and plead for their freedom. Surely she would understand. Nilanjana went to the royal chamber of the princess and fell at her feet. "Oh, do set the poor birds free, dear Princess", she sobbed. "Don't you see how wretched they are? I hear them cry all day and it breaks my heart. Princess, how can you find your life's happiness by giving such pain to the poor creatures?"

Princess Rupanjali's eyes flashed dangerously as she pushed Nilanjana off her feet. "Here speaks the merciful one", she said sarcastically. "Is there any one around? Take her away and imprison her with the birds." Instantly the royal guards appeared and dragged Nilanjana to the prison. Princess Rupanjali looked at her and laughed a cruel laugh.

Nilanjana was shoved into a corner of the bird-prison where she cried herself to sleep. Just before dawn she was suddenly awakened. Someone was calling her in a soft, sweet voice. She opened her eyes to find a little red bird speaking to her.

"Do set me free", Nilanjana, it said. "How cruel you human beings are! Just see how the chain has bruised my wings and I am starving. Set me free or I shall die."

"You poor darling!" said Nilanjana and kissed the little bird. "How you have suffered! I will break off your chains. I don't care what happens to me." She tried with all her strength and skill to break the chains without hurting the bird. At last, after hours of patient labour, she set it free with sore and bleeding hands.



She dashed into the prison only to see it flying away from Nilanjana's hands

In the meanwhile, Princess Rupanjali got the news that the red parrot had been caught. She dashed into the prison only to see it flying away from Nilanjana's hands. She kicked her in a blaze of wrath and fury.

"You wicked, wretched girl! How dare you set free my parrot! You shall die for it. I swear!"

Nilanjana clasped her hands in remorse. "Do forgive me, Princess", she cried. "I had not realized that it was a parrot and the one you were looking for. I only saw how much it was suffering. Indeed, it would have surely died if I had not set it free when I did".

At Rupanjali's command Nilanjana was taken to the top of a hill. From here she would be thrown into the gushing waterfall far down below. The tears, pleadings and entreaties of the people left the princess completely unmoved. Even the king and the queen could not change her decision. Nilanjana had released the parrot and die she must.

Rupanjali stood watching as they gave Nilanjana a push, but before she had fallen a foot or two a pair of strong arms rescued her. Trembling with shock and relief, Nilanjana looked up to see the handsomest man she had ever seen. "I am the Rainbow Prince," he said and gently put her on the ground.

"How wonderful for our princess, now that you are well," she said smiling with real happiness, "and where is the dear little red bird?"

"You shall have it for your own," said the Prince. Then he took off his garland and placed it round Nilanjana's neck.

"But what does this mean?" she asked, bewildered, "Don't you know that I am only a poor peasant girl?"



Rupanjali stood watching as they gave Nilanjana a push, but before she had fallen a foot or two a pair of strong arms rescued her

“You are now my Queen,” said the Prince with a smile
“That story of the Red Parrot was only a test Princess
Rupanjali may be fairer than you are, but in kindness, bravery,
loyalty and things that really count in life, you have beaten
her ”

And he placed her upon his golden chariot and made for
the land of Rainbows.

The Prince and the Shepherd

LONG, long ago there lived a prince and his best friend was a shepherd boy. They spent a great deal of time together, playing and roaming around and talking about all that they would do when they grew up. The shepherd boy had a flute which he played beautifully, and the little prince would listen to him for hours, enraptured. Sometimes the birds and the deer flocked around them without any fear, and this added to the joy of the two friends. "When you are the king, you won't let the people shoot these poor creatures, will you?" the shepherd boy would ask

"Indeed, I will not," said the little prince with equal fervour.

"And you won't forget me?" the shepherd boy would ask in a timid voice

"How can I?" the prince would say in a voice tinged with wonder. "You're my best friend, aren't you? I'll make you my Chief Advisor."

"Would you still care for my flute when you're the king?"

"I shall give you a flute made of gold!" said the prince solemnly.

Years flew by. The prince and the shepherd were separated as a matter of course. The prince was busy studying,

riding, fencing, and learning to take up his duties as king. The shepherd boy roamed about all alone. He never made another friend. Eventually, the prince, now a young man, married a beautiful princess — Kanakmala. He forgot his childhood friend and did not even call him for the wedding. But the shepherd longed to meet the prince once again. He went to the palace, uninvited, to offer his congratulations. The prince, however, did not recognize him and walked past him loftily. The coronation took place the very next day and the prince was duly proclaimed king of the land. The shepherd quietly crept away with tears in his eyes. No one missed him or asked for him.

The next morning, when the new king woke up, he found that something terrible had happened. His entire body was covered with millions of needles. There were needles on his face, and needles on his hands. There were needles in his hair and needles on his feet. His eyes, ears, and mouth were tightly pinned up with needles. He just lay there in agony, unable to see, unable to speak, unable to move.

When Kanakmala found him in this state, she was in despair and began to pluck out the needles. But she soon realized that it was a hopeless task, for as soon as she plucked out one, other two appeared in its place and she made no headway at all.

Very soon, the entire kingdom came to know about the king, and many people came and tried to pull the needles out. No one succeeded. Kanakmala, however, did not give up trying. Day after day, she toiled at pulling them out till her hands were sore and bleeding. Thinking that a dip in the river



"Would you still care for my flute when you are the king?"

would refresh her, she walked up to the bathing *ghat*. A young, pretty girl was sitting on the steps all alone "Do you need a maid, fair Queen?" she asked in an eager voice "Please say 'Yes', I have no one and nowhere to go. I shall do all your odd jobs."

Kanakmala had a kind and tender heart and saw no reason to distrust the girl. "Will you help me pluck out the needles from the king's body?" she asked.

"Indeed, I will," said the girl.

"Very well" said the queen "You may come along with me after I have taken my bath."

"The water is muddy," said the queen's new maid, turning up her nose "Let me hold your royal robe and jewellery"

The queen laughed and took them off.

Kanakmala had hardly taken a dip when she heard an arrogant voice say, "Hurry up, woman! And don't take ages. You've to reach the palace and do all my odd jobs."

The queen looked up, amazed by the tone and the words, and found the maid dressed in the royal robes, the jewellery, and the crown. "How dare you!" cried Kanakmala. "Give back my things at once!"

The maid merely laughed. "I'm the queen now," she said "I've tricked you properly, haven't I? No one can possibly find me out! Ha! ha! ha!"

As Kanakmala was a bride, she usually wore the bridal veil to cover her face. So the only two persons who could have recognized the impostor were the old king and the queen. But they were away on a long pilgrimage. And the new king's eyes were pinned up by needles, so he could not see the impostor either.



When Kanakmala found him in this state, she was in despair and began to pluck out the needles.

The maid had a grand time, posing as the queen. She ordered everyone about and made life miserable for everyone. She did not bother to go to the needled king, and took great care to see that Kanakmala did not go either. It would be very awkward, indeed, if Kanakmala succeeded in pulling the needles out. The prince would then know the impostor at once !

Kanakmala spent her days in utter misery. The imposter kept her at hard jobs all day long. She cried herself to sleep every night. The people in the palace also got very tired of the maid queen's arrogant ways and her apparent lack of manners. Though everyone felt suspicious about the remarkable change in their queen, they could not do anything about it !

One day Kanakmala, tired after a hard day's work, begged for permission to go for a dip in the river. The maid agreed, thinking that the queen would not be able to do anything by herself. Kanakmala just sat on the steps of the bathing *ghat* and cried bitterly, thinking of the day she had so foolishly fallen into the imposter's trap. Then, she suddenly pricked up her ears. A beggar, sitting under a tree just behind her, was chanting something in a sing-song voice. It was a peculiar chant, for he said .

“If I had a hundred needles

I would buy a crown.

“If I had a thousand needles

I would buy a town !

“If I had a million needles

I would dance and sing—

If I had a billion needles

I would be a king !”



"I am the Queen now"

Kanakmala was quite amazed Who was this funny man craving for needles ? She got up and spoke to him “Do you really want a billion needles ?” She asked. “I can give them to you, but you will have to pluck them out yourself”

The beggar followed her without a word. Kanakmala took him to the palace and pointed out the king’s room “The king is locked in there,” she whispered. “Can you get in by the window? The king has needles all over the body.”

The beggar got into the king’s room by the window and looked at the king, who was a mass of needles. The beggar took out a big ball of threads from his pocket and began to chant .

“Needles, now your work is done !
Needles, now your cause is won !
Hurry up threads, be quick at last —
And pull out every needle fast !”

As soon as the chant was complete, the threads jumped up from his hand, got into the eyes of the needles, and pulled them all out at one stroke

The king was free at last. This time he did not fail to recognize the beggar in front of him. It was none other than his childhood friend, the shepherd. The king embraced him, saying, “Forgive me, my friend. It was, indeed, wicked of me to have forgotten my best friend and all my promises. I deserved my punishment, but please don’t leave me again !”

The shepherd returned his embrace and said he would serve him faithfully all his life.

What a shock the maid got when she saw the king walking out of the room, unaided.

“Who are you ?” cried the king as soon as he saw her. “What have you done to Kanakmala ? Bring her to me this moment, or I shall have you beheaded right now.”



"If I had a hundred needles I would buy a crown"

The maid rushed to fetch the queen, trembling all over. Kanakmala was overjoyed to find that everything was well at last. The maid was imprisoned for life, out of everyone's way. The king and the queen lived happily ever after, with the faithful shepherd to keep them company.

Two Sisters

ONCE upon a time, there lived a weaver who had two wives. Each of them had a daughter. One was called Sukhu or 'happiness', the other Dukhu or 'sorrow'. They lived happily enough as long as the weaver was alive, but when he died all of a sudden, the fate of the two sisters took completely different turns. Sukhu's mother got hold of all the property of the weaver and turned Dukhu and her mother out of the house. Being simple and peace-loving by nature, they accepted their lot without a murmur. Sukhu and her mother, being well-off, lived a life of luxury and ease. Dukhu and her mother lived in a lowly little hut, and had to work from dawn to dusk in order to make both ends meet. They were so kind and helpful that everyone liked them just as everyone detested arrogant Sukhu and her mother.

One morning, as Dukhu sat spinning at her wheel, a gust of wind blew off the cotton from her hands. Greatly upset, poor Dukhu ran after the wind, imploring it to give the cotton back to her as they were too poor to lose it. But the naughty wind only laughed and blew the cotton further and further away. Dukhu tried to follow it, tears in her eyes. At last, the wind took pity on her and said, "Go to my mother, the old woman in the moon, who weaves puffs of clouds all day long. She'll give you back your cotton."

As Dukhu was running fast, a cow by the roadside called out to her, "Dukhu," said the cow in a mournful voice, "I've had nothing to eat for hours Won't you stop for a while and give me some grass to eat?"

Dukhu stopped at once. She cleaned out the cowshed thoroughly, gave the cow some grass, and resumed her journey.

She soon heard another cry. This time it was a plantain tree. It said, "Dukhu, the strong wind has been ruffling my branches and I feel uneasy. Can you do something about it?"

Dukhu fixed it up by trying the branches firmly. She then ran after the wind. The next one to stop her was a huge banyan tree. "Dukhu ! Dukhu !" it cried. "The birds have made such a mess beneath my branches. Do sweep it clean for me."

Dukhu stopped and swept the place clean and began to run again. The last one to stop her was a thirsty horse who wanted a drink of water. No one called her again. Dukhu did not stop running till she reached the old woman in the moon

This woman was sitting in a large courtyard spinning yarns of moonbeam from great puffs of clouds. Her hair was white as snow. Her clothes were made of the finest moonbeams.

Dukhu walked up to her and stood by timidly, not daring to speak. But the old woman did not look up. So Dukhu plucked up courage and said. "Please, grandma, your son the wind has blown off a handful of my cotton. We are very poor and my mother will scold me for losing it. The wind told me to ask you for my cotton May I have it please?"

"What a sweet little girl !" exclaimed the old woman in the moon "Of course, you'll get your cotton, dear. But first of all, you must have a bath in that pool yonder and also have something to eat."



"Go to my mother, the old woman in the moon ... She will give you back your cotton"

"But I don't have any extra clothes" said Dukhu, "nor a towel to dry myself"

"Go to that room," said the old woman, pointing to a room in the east, "and you will find everything there. After you've had a dip, go to the next room and you'll find some food awaiting you. See me after you've had it and I'll give you your cotton"

When Dukhu entered the room, her eyes nearly popped out, for it was full of the loveliest clothes she had ever seen. She was about to pick out the brightest of them when she remembered her mother's words. It is wrong to be greedy. So she picked up the simplest sari from the heap and a rough, coarse towel. Then she went to the pool. It looked so clear and oh ! so inviting. Dukhu jumped in and took a dip. The old woman had told her that she should take just three dips and no more. So, Dukhu took two more dips and got out of the pool.

It so happened that the pool was an enchanted one. The first dip made her the wisest girl on earth. The second one made her the most beautiful. The third dip covered her with the choicest of jewellery from head to foot. But Dukhu was so busy thinking of the old woman's kindness that she did not really notice any of these things—not even the fact that her simple sari had turned into a gorgeous "Banarasi".

Dukhu went into the next room and found a table laden with the most delicious of dishes. But before she could taste any of them, she remembered her mother. She must be saving up her frugal salt-and-rice lunch, thinking Dukhu might be doubly hungry after her run. Dukhu felt a strange lump in her throat and could eat no more than a little salt and rice herself. Then she went back to the old woman. "Please, may I have my cotton now?" She said in a soft voice. "I must go home or my mother will get very worried."



"Dukhu reached home at last"

The old woman pointed out a row of caskets of various sizes. "Take whichever you like," she said and turned to her spinning. Once more Dukhu thanked her, picked up the smallest casket and started on her homeward journey.

The horse stopped her once again, saying, "You were kind to me, Dukhu. Here's a pony for you to ride on."

The banyan tree called out to her next. "Stop a while, Dukhu. Take this pot of gold coins. It was kind of you to have cleaned up this place, so here's something in return."

Dukhu placed the pot on the pony as she thanked the tree. "Now my poor mother need not work so hard," she thought gratefully. The cow presented her with a lovely white calf, and the plantain tree gave her a huge bunch of golden bananas. Laden with all these presents, Dukhu reached home at last.

Her mother had been greatly worried at her disappearance so long. She cried out in joy when she saw Dukhu and hugged her. The little casket had fluffs of cotton and was crammed with precious gems—enough for them to spend their whole life in comfort.

But Dukhu and her mother, being generous by nature, felt it their duty to share all this with Sukhu and her mother. After all, wasn't Sukhu her half-sister? So it was for her to share everything with Sukhu, though she had been unkind to Dukhu and her mother. Thinking thus, they made for the home that had once been theirs but from which they had been so mercilessly driven away.

"Sister," said Dukhu's mother to Sukhu's mother, "the old woman in the moon has given a lot of things to Dukhu. We've brought half of them for Sukhu."

Sukhu's mother, however, was too jealous to see them, and started saying a lot of nasty things to her. "Take your rubbish and clear out of this place!" she said, giving Dukhu's



“Greed always brings its own punishment” said she to Sukhu

mother a push. "We want none of it My own Sukhu will get plenty of better things from the old woman !" Hurt and puzzled, Dukhu and her mother left the place

Next morning, Sukhu sat spinning at her wheel and left the cotton scattered all over the place When the wind blew it off, she began to run after it, saying, "You horrid, nasty, wind ! Give me back my cotton at once." The wind said nothing, but Sukhu ran on, following him.

When the cow called her and asked for some grass, she made a face and said, "What cheek ! Imagine ME bothering about a mere animal !" When the banyan tree asked her to clean up the place, she stuck out her tongue and said, "Clean your own mess !" When the horse asked for water, she gave it a kick of contempt and ran on

At last, she reached the old woman in the moon and as the old dame did not look up, Sukhu gave her an impatient push. The old woman looked up, surprised. Sukhu made a rude face at her and said, "Get up, old fool ! And give me all the things that you've given to that silly Dukhu."

"What a rude, ill-mannered child !" said the old woman in amazement. Then she turned to Sukhu and said, "Very well". She gave Sukhu the directions about the pool and the two rooms.

Sukhu grabbed the most expensive clothes and made for the pool. The first two dips made her wise and beautiful. The third one gave her fine jewellery. But a naughty impulse, which even her newly acquired wisdom could not drown, made her take yet another dip, in the hope of getting more. But this dip, instead, made her the ugliest girl in the world, with all her wisdom gone and her jewels turning into tattered rags. Wild and enraged, Sukhu took yet another dip. This time her ugly body was covered with sores and pimples. Screaming and sobbing, Sukhu went to the old woman and

called her the rudest names for doing this to her

But the old woman shook her head and said that she had nothing to do with it, for had she not specifically forbidden, Sukhu to take more than three dips in the pool. "Greed always brings its own punishment !" said she to Sukhu.

"Give me the casket, you horrid old woman !" said Sukhu, "and mind you, give me a bigger one than Dukhu's."

"The caskets are all there," said the old woman pointing to a corner. "You can take whichever you like."

Sukhu picked up the biggest casket and ran off without even thanking the old woman

On her way home, the horse saw her and pushed her into a ditch. Covered with mud, Sukhu got up crying. When she passed by the banyan tree, an enormous branch broke and fell upon her, hurting her badly while the cow chased her so fiercely that Sukhu ran home, panting for breath.

Her mother screamed when she saw Sukhu in that terrible state. But she was somehow consoled when she saw the enormous casket. "I'm sure it contains a fortune !" she cried, her eyes shining with greed "Now we're going to be richer than Dukhu and her mother. We'll show them !"

But the casket had no money. When they opened it, a huge cobra crawled out and chased them. Sukhu and her mother ran for their lives till they went out of the village And they never dared to come back after that.

Ramdhan's Luck

LONG, long ago there lived a king whose subjects were good and loyal people. But the king was not happy. There did not seem to be a single man in his kingdom who was outstanding in any way. The king was certain that not one of them would be of any use if they ever had to use their brains. His chief adviser was an extremely clever and efficient man, but he was getting very old and would soon need to retire. The king could not decide whom to put in his place.

One day, a young lad came to the court. He said his name was Ramdhan. He begged the king to give him a job.

"What can you do?" asked the king.

"Oh, anything," Ramdhan said boldly.

"But, will you be able to earn enough to live on?"

"I will," replied Ramdhan with great confidence.

"Please understand clearly that though I shall give you a job to do, I shall pay you nothing. If you have any intelligence, you will find some means to support yourself from the job," said the king.

"That's perfectly all right," said Ramdhan cheerfully.

"All I want is a job to do! I can manage the rest."

The king, after consulting his chief adviser, thought of a job which he felt sure Ramdhan would not find at all easy. He told Ramdhan to measure the different roads of the kingdom, and gave him a set of tapes and measures.

Ramdhan went to the busiest part of the market and ordered all the vendors to move away so that he could measure the place. They were terribly annoyed at first, but their anger soon turned to dismay when they realized that Ramdhan really had the king's permission to do as he said. "But how long will it take?" they asked in alarm.

"Can't say," Ramdhan replied gravely, "possibly the whole of today. It's a big job and I have to do it alone".

"But our business will be ruined!" cried the vendors. "Can't you measure the place with all of us here?"

"It will be far more difficult," said Ramdhan. "Besides, I don't see why I should."

The vendors offered to pay him a percentage of their profit, if only he would leave them alone.

When Ramdhan went to the king that evening to submit the measurements, he also took a bag of money and gave it to the king.

"Don't tell me that you made all this money just by measuring roads!" the king cried in amazement. "And why have you brought it to me? I told you that you could keep what you earned!"

"I have kept what I need," replied Ramdhan, "the rest belongs to you, because I was doing your work."

The king was pleased, though he did not say anything. But he found another job for Ramdhan the next day and told him to stand at the bell-tower the whole day and give the time-signal at every hour. He was to ring the bell once at one o'clock, twice at two o'clock, and so on.

Ramdhan found the new job exceedingly boring. He wondered how on earth he was to make any money — even the meagre amount necessary to buy food. Never had time passed so slowly before. 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock — Ramdhan wondered if the night would ever pass!

By 2 a.m., Ramdhan was so bored that he decided to ring the bell five times instead of twice just to see if anything unusual would happen. Even if someone came to scold him for the mistake, at least it would create a diversion.

Now, it so happened that a burglar had decided to rob the palace that very night. He was just gloating over this loot when he heard the bell. He shot up in alarm when he heard five strokes. Good gracious ! Had he taken all that long to steal just half-a-dozen bags of gold coins ! And now it was almost morning ! So many people would be up at five o'clock ! Just then he caught sight of Ramdhan pacing about just below the bell-tower ! Was he coming to catch him and take him straight to the king ? The burglar ran and fell at Ramdhan's feet and begged for mercy. He was still clutching a couple of bags in his hand. He gave both to Ramdhan and begged him to keep quiet. Ramdhan, though startled, did not show it. He gravely took the bags and warned the burglar never to do such a thing again, if he wanted to stay alive.

When the king saw the two bags full of gold coins the next morning, he was astonished.

"Don't tell me that you made all that money in one night just by ringing the bell !" he cried. Ramdhan was honest and told him the whole story, adding that he had taken only one coin to pay for his food.

"This money was earned accidentally," said the king. "Your new job will be to sit beside the river the whole day and count the waves."

So Ramdhan sat in a conspicuous place beside the river and would not let any boat pass.

"I am doing a job for the king and I cannot be disturbed," he told the people whom he held up. "And, besides, if I let you pass, the waves will break and I shall lose count." The people on the boats were mostly merchants and they were



By 2 a.m., Ramdhan was so bored that he decided to ring the bell five times instead of twice just to see anything unusual would happen.

greatly annoyed at the thought of their business suffering on account of being delayed on the way. They gave Ramdhan large sums of money to let them pass

That evening, Ramdhan had a fantastic amount of money to hand over. The king and his old adviser were astonished. But, when they heard how it had happened, they thought that the broken waves must have made correct counting impossible. "I am sure there was no mistake," said Ramdhan with great confidence. "And, if you really want to verify it, why don't you count the waves yourself and see?" Both the king and his adviser felt that Ramdhan was too smart for them and, of course, they did not have the slightest desire to waste a whole day counting waves !

"I have a new job for you !" said the king "You will just sit beside me tomorrow and speak nothing "

The next morning, Ramdhan wore his grandest clothes, put on a large turban, and carried a huge bag and a notebook. He managed to sit a little behind the king so that he could not see Ramdhan properly, though the other people of the court had a clear view of him. He got up every now and then and pretended to whisper to the king nod and smile. He also pretended to write something in his notebook and whisper it to the king. The people were very much impressed by this and thought that he must be someone very important to sit so close to the king and advise him every now and then. They also saw Ramdhan looking at them and patting his enormous bag. So, they thought that if they could put in a coin or two into Ramdhan's bag, he would be pleased and would in turn put in a good word for them to the king. Each one, as he passed by, put a few coins into Ramdhan's bag, with a slip containing his name and a special request.

When Ramdhan saw what was happening, he frowned at them and shook his head. The people thought that he was annoyed because they had given him so little. So, they began to put in more and more money. In a short while Ramdhan's bag was literally bursting ! He handed it all to the king, who did not say anything

That evening, Ramdhan was summoned to the palace. The king smiled at him and patted him on the back "You are a smart boy, Ramdhan," he said, "you will be able to help me very much My old adviser retires tonight and tomorrow you shall take his place "

After some years, Ramdhan married the king's only daughter. Later he became the king and ruled kindly, wisely, and well.

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The Wheel of Destiny

ONCE upon a time, there lived a merchant, called Dhanapal. He was extremely proud of his wealth and position in society. Though people were polite to him, no one really liked him very much, because he was often unfair, mean, and unscrupulous in money matters

Dhanapal was fond of showing off his wealth, so he often threw grand parties and banquets, inviting all the important people of the town. These were joyous occasions for poor people, who flocked at his backdoor and collected all the leftovers.

An orphan boy, named Somdutt, lived not far away from Dhanapal's house. Both his parents had died of a sudden illness, leaving him all alone in the world, and no one had volunteered to take care of him. Little Somdutt slept under the trees and lived on the food thrown away from Dhanapal's house. The servants liked the little boy and always kept some tit-bits for him.

One morning, as Somdutt sat under a tree eating his breakfast of leftovers, two men passed by talking between themselves. One of them was a well-known astrologer. "Look at the cruelty of Destiny," said the other man. "Here's Dhanapal, rolling in more money than he knows what to do with and getting richer every day; just by his side is this little boy, fair enough to be a prince yet living on leftovers"

"Don't let either instance dishearten you," said the astrologer with a smile

"The wheel of Destiny is never still and has its own way of bringing about justice "

"How ?" asked the other man curiously

"You will be surprised if I tell you what fate has in store for these two. It may be years from now, but this little beggar will one day come to possess all of Dhanapal's wealth !"

"Strange !" exclaimed the other man "But how can that be ? Dhanapal is not childless. He has a son and a daughter, too. Why should he adopt a beggar ?"

"I can't tell you how exactly Destiny will bring it about, but I know for certain that it'll be so."

Unnoticed by them, Dhanapal was, at that moment, standing near the window, and overheard all that was said by the two men At first, he laughed scornfully. "Destiny indeed ! As if anything on earth would induce me to adopt that cursed little beggar, handsome though he might be Of course, they were talking nonsense. Utter nonsense !" mused Dhanapal. However, a feeling of uneasiness haunted him from that day. At last, he made up his mind not to take any chances He sent for a butcher and asked him to take Somdutt inside a deep forest and kill him there. "And you must show me the blood-stained dagger after you have done the deed. Else I shall not pay you," he added.

It was not difficult to take Somdutt to the forest He was only four years old and had not, as yet, learnt to doubt or distrust people. The butcher asked Somdutt to follow him if the latter wanted to see something wonderful. Somdutt cheerfully trotted along behind him with a trustful smile.

The butcher was, after all, a human being, and little Somdutt, with his angelic smile, won his heart completely. By the time they reached the thick of the forest, Somdutt had

become absolutely sleepy from exhaustion. The butcher left him under a tree, killed a fox, and took the blood-stained dagger to Dhanapal.

An old milkman, called Govinda, lived in the same forest. He was returning home with his cattle when he saw the sleeping child under the tree. He was too astonished for words. How could such a little boy come to the forest all alone? Govinda was a childless man. He had visited all the shrines in the country, beseeching the gods to bless him with a son. He now felt that the boy was a gift from Lord Siva himself.

He picked up the sleeping child and took him home. His wife was beside herself with joy when she saw the little boy. "Whose child is he?" She cried. "Isn't he a little angel?"

"He is a gift from the gods", said Govinda. "I am sure you'll be happy now."

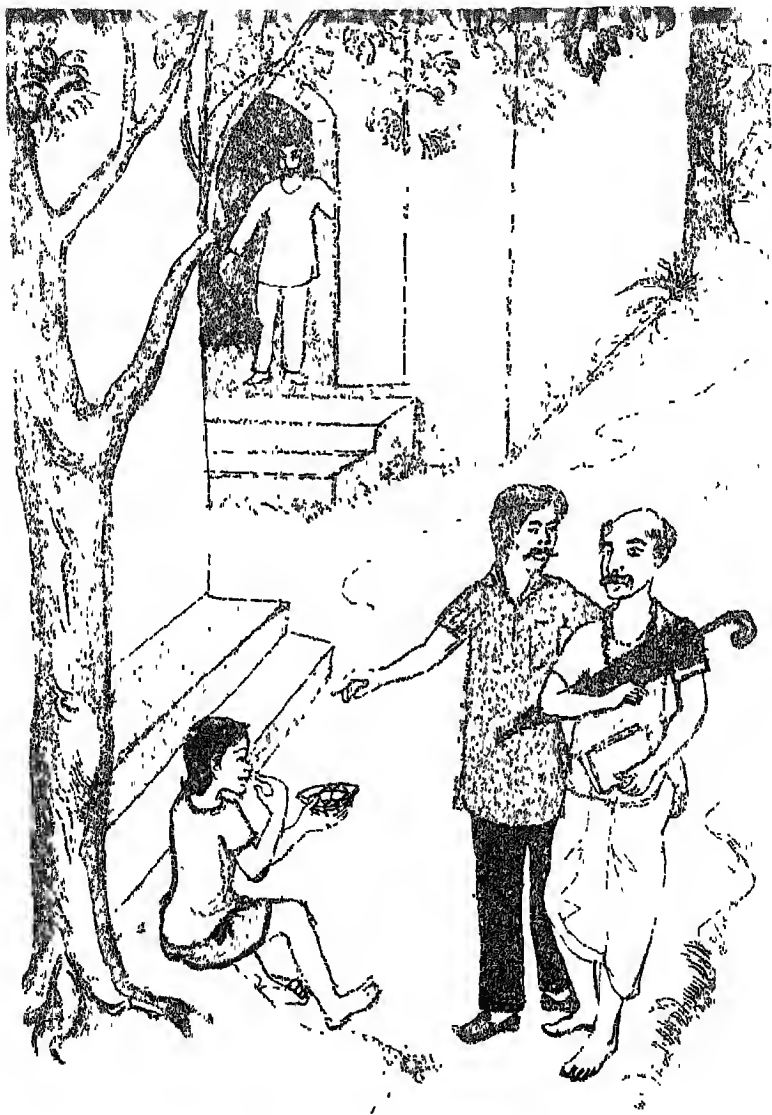
"He looks like a little prince!" said his wife rapturously. "Are you sure his people won't come and take him away?"

Somdutt was awake now. When he heard them, he said, "I've no one of my own and no one wants me either. I would love to stay with you here."

Years flew by. Somdutt was a young man now, the adored darling of the old couple. He looked after the cattle and took over all of Govinda's work. They lived a quiet and happy life in the forest and asked for nothing more.

One evening, Dhanapal happened to pass by the same forest and his eyes fell on young Somdutt who was taking the cattle home. Dhanapal recognized him instantly and asked him who he was. "I am the son of Govinda, the milkman", said Somdutt.

"Really?" said Dhanapal looking at him closely. "Please take me to your father, will you?"



"I can't tell you how exactly Destiny will bring it about, but I know for certain that it will be so".

Somdutt took him home to Govinda who was astonished to see Dhanapal. The latter's contempt for people poorer than he was well known. But Govinda welcomed him humbly

"I understand that this young man is your son, Govinda," Dhanapal said without any preamble

"Yes, sir," said Govinda.

"But I thought you were childless," said Dhanapal. "I certainly remember being told so, some years ago."

"God decided to be kind to us rather late in life," agreed Govinda.

"I want an urgent message to be sent home," said Dhanapal "Could your son carry the letter?"

"Of course, sir," said Govinda, overwhelmed by Dhanapal's gesture

Dhanapal wrote a letter to his son, urging him to give poison to the bearer of the letter at once, and see to it that everything was over before he returned home. He added that it was extremely important and that there should be no hesitation about it.

Somdutt carried the letter, not knowing what it contained. By the time he neared Dhanapal's hometown, it was dusk and he was dead tired. He sat down under a tree intending to rest for a few minutes, but he was so exhausted that he promptly fell asleep.

Just then, one of the court-dancers passed by and she stopped in surprise on seeing the sleeping youth. He was so very handsome. She then caught sight of the letter lying beside him. She opened it out of curiosity and read the contents. A mischievous smile broke on her face. She hated Dhanapal. She had hated him ever since he had grabbed her father's property by unlawful means. Here was a good chance to pay him back. She took up the letter once again. Poison is called '*Veesh*' in Sanskrit and the name of Dhanapal's



The butcher left him under a tree, killed a fox, and took the blood-stained dagger to Dhanapal.

daughter was Veesha. The letter was written in red ink. The lady pricked her finger with a thorn and added a vertical line after "Veesha" writing it in her own blood. Veesha was the apple of her father's eye. Now she would be married to the man Dhanapal was bent upon killing !

Somdutt woke up after a while and hurried to Dhanapal's house. Dhanapal's son read the letter and called him inside. "Give Veesha to this young man immediately," his father had written. Somdutt was given a set of new clothes. A priest was sent for, and Somdutt and Veesha were married in an hour's time.

When Dhanapal came home the next day and heard everything, he could not guess who had tampered with his letter. Somdutt could not have done it, as he did not know how to read or write. Dhanapal was full of wrath, though he kept it to himself.

"I'll still kill you, you beggar !" he muttered to himself. Then he sent for Somdutt and told him that he should go and worship at the family temple at once. He had already posted a man there with orders to kill anyone who entered the temple, whosoever it might be.

Somdutt was about to go when Dhanapal's son met him. "Where are you going ?" he asked Somdutt.

"To the temple," said Somdutt. "Father said I must go at once."

"Then go and fetch Veesha," said her brother. "I'm sure she would also like to go for worship with you. I shall proceed first and wait for both of you there."

When Dhanapal saw Somdutt coming back to the house he was enraged. "Haven't you gone to the temple yet ?" he shouted.

"Your son asked me to take Veesha with me. I've just come to fetch her."



Dhanapal gave a piercing shriek and ran towards the temple But it was too late

"And where is my son ?" asked Dhanapal turning white.

"At the temple, waiting for us," said Somdutt.

Dhanapal gave a piercing shriek and ran towards the temple. But it was too late. His son lay at the door in a pool of blood. His lifeless eyes seemed to stare at him accusingly. Dhanapal cursed himself and tore his hair. "You shall die Somdutt," he cried "You shall, you shall !"

That evening, Dhanapal got two plates of fruits. He poisoned one lot of fruits and gave the plates to his wife. "These are special fruits," he told her. "When we have supper, give the gold plate to your son-in-law and the silver one to me."

"Very well," said his wife and took away the fruits. When they sat down to eat, she thought it very silly to serve her husband in a silver plate when there were so many gold plates at home. So she served them in identical gold plates. She happened to give the poisoned fruits to Dhanapal, not knowing that they were poisoned.

Dhanapal fell in a swoon as soon as he ate the fruits. He never got up. The entire house was plunged in grief. Somdutt inherited all of Dhanapal's property and wealth but, unlike him, he lived a life of peace and generosity and was greatly loved by all.

"Do you think it was the wheel of Destiny punishing my father ?" Veesha asked her husband.

"I don't know about Destiny," said Somdutt. "But I do know that no good can be born of evil. If we are good and lead a useful life, God will bless us."

Veesha agreed. They lived happily.

The Magic Chant

"SO today is the last day !" said Kishore, tying up his things in a neat bundle.

"Yes, it is," said Prince Kaushik, looking out of the window at the green fields beyond. "And we'll be home, all of us, with new things to do."

It was the time when all children went to the '*guru griha*' for their education. There, in the peaceful surroundings of the woods, the prince and the pauper lived under the same roof, learning the same things. They shared a common love and respect for the '*guru*' who taught them and forgot all their social differences. That is how the grocer's son, Kishore, and Prince Kaushik were friends.

Kaushik was simple, intelligent, but not shrewd. He trusted everyone. Everyone was a friend to him. He regarded Kishore as a friend because Kishore seemed devoted to him. Kaushik himself was straightforward, and so he did not suspect slyness or dishonesty in anyone else.

"It makes me sad to think that we may never see each other again," said Kishore, looking distressed, "Unless, of course, we visit each other."

"Why not?" said Kaushik. "You'll always be welcome in my house."

"And you in mine," said Kishore, "Why don't you visit mine first before you go off to your palace?"

"I will, if you want me to," said Kaushik.

Both the lads started for Kishore's house the next day, reaching there just before sunset.

Kishore asked Kaushik to wait outside while he went in to call his parents to welcome him properly. Kaushik stood under a tree, waiting to be called in. But minutes passed. Kaushik was puzzled, and wondered if his friend had forgotten him in all the excitement of home-coming. Then suddenly he heard voices, many voices. Kishore's parents came out accompanied by his brother and sisters, and Kishore himself.

"Who is that boy?" asked Kishore's mother pointing at Kaushik.

"And what is he doing there under the tree?" asked Kishore's father steamily.

"Oh! I forgot to tell you about him," said Kishore. "He is the new servant I brought along with me!"

"A servant?" Kishore's father frowned. "We don't need any one! What work can he do?"

"Nothing much, if you ask me," said Kishore. "But I felt sorry for the poor chap and asked him to come along. He can at least cut the grass for our cows."

"He looks hungry," Kishore's mother looked at Kaushik's tired face. "I'll give him some food."

"Don't spoil him, mother," said Kishore. "Give him plain puffed rice. That's good enough for a servant!"

"And give him some work," said Kishore's father. "I won't have any lazy bones in my house!"

Poor Kaushik was too stunned to believe his own ears at first. But he soon realized it was no joke and that he had fallen into a wicked trap set by his friend. But he decided to say nothing for the time being.



"Oh, I forgot to tell you about him," said Kishore. "He is the new servant I brought along with me".

"Here," said Kishore, throwing him the sickle, "Go and cut some grass for our cows !"

Kaushik picked up the sickle without a word and made for the woods. He wondered at first if he could get away to his own home. But it was cowardly to run away. Kaushik decided to stay for the present and see things through. However, he felt sorry and very depressed. The thought that he had been betrayed by a friend was not a happy one.

He was so lost in thoughts that the sickle slipped from his hand cutting a finger in half. Kaushik groaned as he saw blood gushing out. The pain was more than he could bear.

Just at that moment, Lord Siva and his consort Parvati were going back to heaven after a tour of the world. As the ethereal chariot cut across the clouds, Parvati heard Kaushik groan way down below. "What is that, my Lord ?" she asked Siva.

"A lad let down by his friend has hurt himself," said Siva.

"Let us go to him for a moment," pleaded Parvati.

"Very well, if that is what you wish," Siva asked his charioteer to alight in front of Kaushik.

"What is the matter, my son ?" asked Parvati.

"Just an accident, mother," said Kaushik wondering who the angelic couple could be.

"Any one to blame for this ?" asked Siva looking at him keenly. "Have you been wronged ?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Kaushik at once, "Just my own carelessness."

"I'll teach you a magic chant to mend your finger," said Parvati. Just hold it together and say :

"For Siva's sake
Hold fast and strong.
Till I say so,
Hold hard and long."

“The chant will hold true in every case,” said Siva. Then before the astonished Kaushik could say a word, the divine couple vanished !

Kaushik blinked his eyes and wondered if he had been dreaming. His finger was bleeding as badly as ever. He decided to try the chant. He said it, and lo and behold ! it healed as though the accident had never happened ! There was no stain of blood and no pain either ! Kaushik blinked again, but he guessed that the gods themselves had come to his rescue.

For a whole month Kaushik lived with Kishore, working all day like a servant. He did not speak to Kishore at all. And Kishore, feeling uncomfortable and ill at ease, avoided him. He had originally intended it as a joke, quite expecting Kaushik to flare up and disclose his identity the first day itself. But when Kaushik did not speak, Kishore was tempted to continue the game and lord over him. And now there seemed no way of ending the uncomfortable game he had started. He even wondered if Kaushik would not try to pay him back.

Kaushik did intend it. Not so much to “pay him back” but to teach him that dishonesty and disloyalty do not pay. He soon got a chance. One morning, as Kishore sat in the sun, his sister brought him a bowl of milk. Kaushik was sweeping the floor. He looked up and saw Kishore sipping from the bowl. Kaushik recited the magic chant softly. The bowl stuck to Kishore’s lips at once ! He jumped up in surprise and tried to pull it off. It was of no use. The bowl stuck as if it had grown there ! He tried to shout, but only a gurgling sound came out !

Kishore jumped about the place, making strange noises. His sister heard him and came running. “What’s the matter ?” she cried. “Why are you biting the bowl like that ?” Kishore tried to speak, but couldn’t.

"Give me that bowl," said the girl, trying to pull it away. Kaushik saw her catch the bowl and repeated the chant. Instantly her hand stuck to the bowl. She howled wildly and asked Kaushik to fetch her parents at once.

Kishore's father was busy when Kaushik interrupted him and told him that his son and daughter wanted him urgently. He frowned but got up and went out. When he saw them struggling with the bowl, he thought they were merely playing the fool. He boxed Kishore's ears and was unable to move his hand away ! Kaushik, watching the fun, had repeated the chant !

Just then Kishore's mother burst upon the scene, rolling-pin in hand "What is all the noise about ? And good heavens ! What do you mean by pulling my poor child's ears ?" She tried to pull away her husband's hand but, to her horror, found her own hand stuck fast to his ! She screamed and shouted !

The old cook came out of the kitchen "For shame !" she cried as she saw the struggling couple.

"Both of you after that young boy ! Let him alone !" The cook tried to pull her mistress away and got stuck to her instead ! There was real pandemonium !

"It must be witchcraft !" shouted Kishore's father.

"Or spirits !" screamed Kishore's mother

"What are we to do ?" cried Kishore's sister. "Father, mother what shall we do ?" They discussed !

"Kaushik was the only one who was not affected by this 'witchcraft' — and naturally so ! But strangely enough, no one suspected him of any trick either. Finally, Kishore's father decided that they should send for the family priest and seek his advice. He asked Kaushik to fetch the priest.

It was almost midnight when Kaushik reached the priest's house. By then it was raining heavily. The priest was not at



"I can't get off," said his wife, "I am stuck"

all pleased to be disturbed in his sleep and was far from willing to come out at once.

"Whatever the matter is, it can wait till morning," he said yawning.

"But, sir, it is most urgent," said Kaushik, "The master told me to bring you at once "

"Must be a wedding or a feast of some kind !" said the priest's wife coming into the room. "And, they may want you to perform the rites."

"What is it, boy ?" asked the priest frowning.

"I was merely asked to take you with me, sir," said Kaushik, evading an answer.

"You'd better go," said the priest's wife, "and I shall come, too !"

"You ?" cried the priest "At night, and in this rain ? Don't be crazy, woman !"

"I am coming" said the priest's wife in a determined voice. "You are always leaving me out of feasts and fun I'm not going to miss this one !"

"But I don't know if this is a feast," said the priest grumbling. "The boy doesn't say so."

"Well, it isn't a death !" argued his wife. "Is any one dead, boy ?"

"No, Madam," said Kaushik truthfully.

"There you are !" cried the priest's wife triumphantly. "It must be a wedding then ! I am coming."

It was still raining hard when the three of them started Kaushik led the way. He suddenly stopped before a puddle "There is a big puddle here. Madam will get very wet !" he said.

"Well, what do you expect me to do ?" shouted the priest. "Carry her ?"

"You could take her on your back and jump across," suggested Kaushik. "It's just a step !"

"Now, that's a really clever idea !" said the priest's wife "I hate walking through puddles "

The priest muttered under his breath and took his wife on his back. Kaushik chuckled and whispered the chant. "Now get off my back," shouted the priest after crossing the puddle. "I can't think why you tagged along all this way !"

"I can't get off," said his wife. "I'm stuck !"

As no amount of shouting, cursing, or pleading was of any use, the poor priest had to walk all the way carrying his wife on his back

Kishore and his people had been anxiously awaiting the priest. They burst out laughing when they saw him come in with his wife on his back. How they laughed ! "It's kind of you to have come !" said Kishore's father. "But why are you carrying madam ? Is she hurt ?"

"Hurt, indeed !" fumed the priest. "The wretched woman refuses to get down !"

"I'm stuck here !" said the priest's wife, embarrassed.

Kishore's father frowned "You, too, are in the same mess as the rest of us."

"But how can such a thing happen ?" fumed the priest. "Someone must know something about it ! Ask this servant of yours !" Then it dawned on everyone that Kaushik alone was free from any trouble. Kishore's father begged him to tell the truth.

Kaushik told them the whole story. He then took back the magic chant and freed them from the spell. Everyone begged his pardon, especially the shamefaced Kishore. Kaushik forgave them and left for his home the next day.

The King and the Goldsmith

SEVERAL hundred years ago, there lived a king, who was very free and frank with his subjects and genuinely interested in their welfare. One day, he sent for all the goldsmiths in the kingdom as he wanted some special jewellery made of gold. After explaining what exactly he wanted, he asked them casually, "Tell me, is it true that all goldsmiths manage to steal some of the gold when they make ornaments?"

"Yes, your majesty," replied the goldsmiths truthfully.

"But can you do it if I supervise your work personally?" he asked, surprised. "Yes, even then," said the goldsmiths. "How much gold can you take?" asked the king.

"I can take the entire quantity if I want to," said one of them, called Chand.

The king decided to test his words. Chand was the youngest of the goldsmiths and did not seem to be particularly clever. "I want to make the conditions absolutely clear," said the king. "You shall come to the palace every morning, bath and change into clothes provided by me. You shall then go to the workroom empty-handed and take the gold and the necessary tools from me. You shall work right under my eyes the whole day and return everything when you go home in the evening. This will be your routine until your work is



Just then a woman came along the road, carrying a huge earthen pot on her head "Fresh curds", she called loudly

complete. Do you think you can take away any gold, let alone all, under these conditions ?”

Chand smiled and said, “Yes, I can ”

“Very well, you can start work tomorrow,” said the king. “I shall reward you if you are successful, but I shall banish you from kingdom if you fail ”

Arriving at the palace the next morning, Chand had a quick dip in the river and changed into the clothes provided for him. He was then taken to the king, who gave him a bar of gold and a set of tools. “I want you to make a small horsecart with this gold,” said the king. “How long will it take you to complete the job ?”

“A fortnight,” replied Chand after some careful calculation.

“Very well,” said the king. “Now get on with your work. Either I or one of my ministers will be with you as long as you are in this room.”

Chand took up the tools and started working. He worked the whole day and when it grew dark, he returned everything to the king’s attendant, changed his clothes and walked back home empty-handed.

On reaching home, he rested for some time. Late at night, he lit his lamp and did something strange. He took a piece of brass and started modelling an identical horsecart. This went on day after day. During the day he worked on the gold horsecart, and at night he worked on the brass one. Both looked identical. Only Chand’s wife knew about the brass horsecart and she knew how to keep secrets.

The horsecart was ready in twelve days. Its beauty and delicate workmanship charmed the king. But he could not imagine how Chand would manage to take away the gold he gave him to work with. He wanted to take away the horsecart and examine it. But Chand shook his head. “It is not yet ready,

your majesty," he told the king. "I must give it a final polish. But before that I must dip it in a bowl of curds and keep it soaked for a whole night. So, please get me a bowl of fresh curds "

The king sent for curds. But there were none at that hour of the evening. The king was annoyed. "Why couldn't you tell me about the curds earlier ?" he asked "Now, I don't see what we can do and I don't want my lovely horsecart to be spoilt "

Just then, a woman came along the road, carrying a huge earthen pot on her head "Fresh curds !" she called loudly. "Fresh curds, the best curds you ever saw."

The king jumped up "We are in luck," he cried "Call the woman in immediately."

The woman walked in with the pot. Chand was polishing the horsecart and did not even look up "Look, Chand," said the king, "Will this do ?"

Chand looked at the curds critically. "It's not very good, but it might just do," he said, not looking at the woman at all

The woman was none other than his wife. Chand had asked her to come to the palace with the pot of curds at that particular time. Inside the curds lay the little brass horsecart!

"How much curds do you want ?" asked Chand's wife

"I want the entire pot," said Chand. Chand dipped the gold horsecart into the curds and took it out immediately. "It's not thick enough," he said, "It won't do Take it away."

"But what about my horsecart ?" asked the king.

"I'll go home and get some good curds," said Chand.

The woman had already left with her pot. In it she carried away the gold horsecart. While dipping it, Chand had picked up the brass cart leaving the gold one in the curds. He went

home and soon returned with some curds. He immersed the brass cart in it and handed it to the king for safe keeping.

The next day the fortnight was up.

"Well, Chand," said the king, "here is the gold horsecart safe with me. What about your claim of taking away all my gold ? You have not been able to take even a mite."

Chand smiled and said, "Please get your experts to examine it."

The king sent for them. They took the horsecart in their hands and frowned, "There isn't a drop of gold in this."

"No gold?" cried the king in astonishment. "But how can that be ? I gave him real gold to work with, and he made it all in my presence. I have not allowed him to take the thing out of my sight for a moment."

"But this cart is made of brass. Every bit of it!" proclaimed the expert.

The king looked at Chand. "Have you really taken all the gold?" he asked, bewildered.

"Yes, I have, Sire," said Chand. "I told you I could do it, didn't I?"

The king laughed and said, "Tell me how you managed to do it."

Chand told him. The king was pleased with his cleverness. "You are too clever to remain a mere goldsmith," he said. "I can put your intelligence to better use."

He made Chand one of his ministers and, in time, Chand became the king's right hand man.

The Rival Kings

KOSHAL Raj, the king of Koshal, reputed to be peerless because of his great love for the poor and the needy (whom he supported at all times), was loved by all. Everyone felt that there was nobody like him in the whole world. everyone except Kashi Raj, who hated him bitterly. He was especially envious of Koshal Raj's reputation for generosity. And what irked him most of all was the fact that even his own subjects considered Koshal Raj to be greater than their own king.

Koshal was a small kingdom compared to Kashi. Kashi Raj felt that he just could not put up with the situation any longer. He felt sure that Koshal Raj did not deserve his fame, because he was just putting on a show in order to make him appear small in the eyes of his own people.

Determined to teach his hated rival a lesson, Kashi Raj challenged Koshal Raj to a battle. The latter was easily defeated and he sought refuge in the forest. Kashi Raj rejoiced at his own victory and said, "Only those who have the might to retain their wealth have the right to call themselves generous !" But even his own courtiers remained silent and did not agree with him. And the masses wept openly for their beloved Koshal Raj. "Alas, we are now fatherless," they cried. "The heartless Rahu has killed the blemishless Moon ! Why did the gods let such a thing happen ?"

The visible grief of the people drove Kashi Raj to a wild fury. How dared they shed tears when he, their own king, was hale and hearty ? And all because his hated rival was in banishment ? Well, he would not put up with it ! He ought not to have allowed Koshal Raj to live on, in the first place ! He would mend matters immediately and let his people see how exactly he felt about the man ! He declared that he would give a hundred gold coins to anyone who produced Koshal Raj before him. There was little doubt as to what he would do afterwards. But the people turned a deaf ear to his announcement.

In the meantime, Koshal Raj roamed the forest alone — his clothes tattered, his locks matted. No one could possibly tell from his looks that he had ever been a king ! One day, he suddenly came across a stranger who asked him if he knew the way to Koshal. “Why do you want to go to that unfortunate kingdom ?” he asked curiously.

“It’s because I want to see the king of Koshal. He is reputed to be the kindest and most generous of kings and I feel sure that he would help me. I am a merchant and I’ve lost my ship. It means that I’ve to beg from door to door — unless Koshal Raj comes to my rescue.”

Koshal Raj looked at the stranger and blinked back his tears. He said, “Well my friend, you’ve come a long way, with a great hope in your heart. I shall see to it that you are not disappointed.”

Kashi Raj sat majestically in his court when a ragged stranger walked in unannounced, followed by another man. “I’m the banished king of Koshal,” said the stranger without any preamble. “Please give your declared prize to my companion here.” The entire hall stood in petrified silence. What was to happen now — now that the king actually had



“Because it is now my turn to be victorious. So I give you back .”

his hated rival in front of him ? Was it to be the end of everything ?

But Kashi Raj gazed at his rival ... and burst out laughing !
“Well, my prisoner, scheming to the last, aren’t you ? So you plan to be ultimately victorious over me by dying ? But you are not going to succeed this time . because it is not my turn to be victorious ! So I give you back ... not merely your kingdom but my eternal friendship, too !” Kashi Raj stepped down and, taking Koshal Raj by the hand, placed him on his own throne, and put his crown on the latter’s matted hair

Instantly the people broke into an applause — loud and hearty And this time they cheered their own king, Kashi Raj ! Not merely because their beloved Koshal Raj was saved, but because their own king had been large-hearted enough to realise his own pettiness and brave enough to make amends so wholeheartedly — before all his subjects !

The Seventh Queen

LONG, long ago there lived a king who had seven queens but no children at all. He was very unhappy and prayed to God that he might be blessed with a little boy or a girl. He did not mind which. He only longed for a child who would bring laughter and sunshine into his lonely palace.

Time passed. Then one day the happy news flew round the kingdom that the seventh queen was going to have a baby. When the time arrived she gave birth to seven little boys and a beautiful little girl. But the other six queens felt so very jealous of her that they took away all the children and buried them in the ash-heap nearby. The seventh queen opened her eyes and asked to be shown the newborn child. "Child ! What child ?" the six queens said together. "You did not bear a human child at all ! Look at those crawling crabs in that corner. Those are your children !" The seventh queen fainted from shock and exhaustion. The king rushed into the room to see the newborn. Once again the jealous queens pointed out the crabs. The king frowned. He had never heard of such a thing happening before. "The seventh queen must be a witch," he said shaking his head. "Drive her out of the kingdom !"

So the seventh queen was thrown out of the palace into the dark forest outside, where she spent her days in utmost

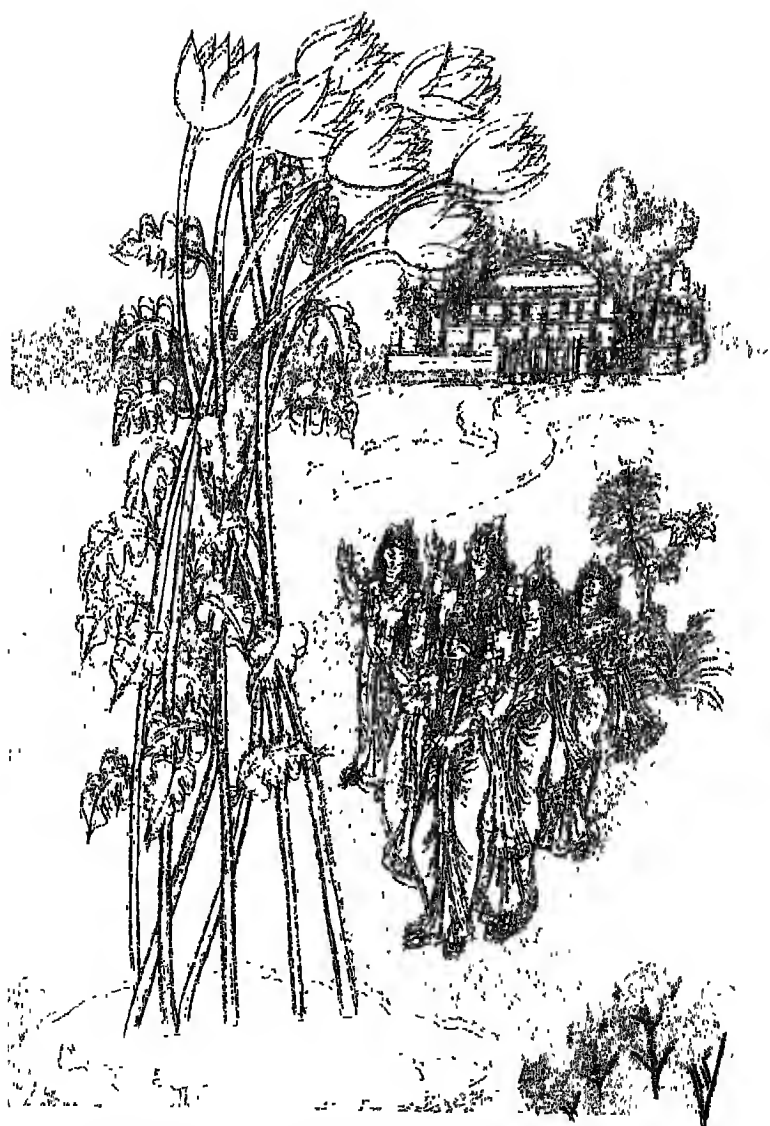
misery and loneliness. She had asked for the crabs before leaving but everyone told her that they had crawled into the lake. So she was all alone and lived on wild berries in the forest. As soon as the seventh queen left the palace a strange thing happened to the kingdom. The birds stopped singing. And worse still, the flowers stopped blooming. The royal servants searched and searched all over the palace. But it was of no use. Not a single flower was to be had. The royal priest went and stood before the king in despair. "Your Majesty !" he said. "How can I worship Lord Siva without a flower ?" "I'll make some arrangements " said the king, looking worried. "Any left over from the last day's worship ?"

"There were," said the priest. "But they've all gone as dry as paper. I can't offer those to the deity !" "Oh dear !" said the king. "I can't imagine what has happened. Now who can find a flower for me ? Even a single flower ? I'll reward anyone who does". A few minutes later one of the gardeners came running and stood before the king. "Your Majesty !" he panted. "There are seven champaks and a camellia blooming on the ash-heap !"

"Bring them !" cried the king. "And I'll reward you like I said ! I wonder how these managed to bloom ! I never noticed that there was a tree on the ash-heap. Strange !"

The gardener, however, was unable to get the flowers. As soon as he tried to touch them, they shot up higher and said in a sweet chorus :

"You can't touch us —
Oh no, oh no !
Let the first queen come.
To her, we'll go !"



The flowers went up higher and higher, touching the clouds and they said —

“The Seventh Queen . . .
..... we’ll go.

The gardener went to the first queen and sought her help. She turned somewhat pale when she heard of what had happened. She knew what she had done at that ash-heap. Nevertheless, she could hardly refuse to go. That would make her guilt all too obvious. Moreover, she had not been the only one responsible for that dreadful deed. She had been helped by the other five queens as well. So it was unlikely that she alone would get into trouble. And what could a bunch of flowers do, anyway ?

The first queen went to the ash-heap and tried to pluck the flowers. But the flowers shot up higher still, saying

“You can’t touch us —

Oh no, oh no !

Let the second queen come.

To her, we’ll go !”

The second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth queens all shared the same fate. None of them was able to touch the flowers. After the sixth queen had made her unsuccessful attempt, the flowers asked for the king.

There was no help for it. The king had to be told about all this and he had to be given the message of the flowers. He was greatly intrigued when he heard about it. He had never heard of flowers talking before, or sending messages either. But so many strange things had been happening of late that this did not seem to be particularly incredible.

To start with, was it not strange for a queen to give birth to crabs ? Or stranger still, for the birds to stop singing ? Or flowers to stop blooming ? The entire world of Nature had been behaving in an unnatural manner. So what was the talking of flowers compared to all this ?

The king went and stood before the trees that had shot up to an enormous height, overlooking the entire kingdom. “Now, how do I get to the flowers ?” he asked the ministers



Seven champaks and the camellia rushed down from the tree top.
"Mother", Mother ! Mother ! they cried joyfully.

who had accompanied him to the trees. "I can't possibly climb up all that height You'd better find me the longest ladder " But he was unable to touch the champaks and the camellia even after climbing up the tallest ladder in the land. The flowers shot up higher still and said what they had said so often before —

"You can't touch us —

Oh no, oh no !

Then they added —

Let the seventh queen come.

And to HER, we'll go !"

"But I've banished the seventh queen !" said the king frowning. "I don't even know where she is !"

The flowers went up higher and higher, touching the clouds and they said —

"The seventh queen, the seventh queen,

The seventh queen, oh !

Find the seventh queen

And to HER, we'll go !"

"Find the seventh queen !" ordered the king. "Find her at any cost ! I MUST have those flowers !"

The king's men scattered far and wide, searching every nook and corner. They soon found the lonely queen in the forest She was pale and thin from lack of food, rest and sheer unhappiness. She went back to the Palace with faltering steps and was taken straight to the trees She did not even need to touch the flowers As soon as they saw her, the seven champaks and the camellia rushed down from the tree top. "Mother!" "Mother!" "Mother!" they cried joyfully as they fell into her out-stretched arms.

But they were flowers no longer. The seven champaks had turned into seven handsome princes and the camellia into a beautiful princess. The queen hugged them and cried for

happiness. She had her children once again. It no longer mattered if she was a queen or not. The other six queens turned pale with fright but they were too scared to move or run away "What does this mean?" asked the king in a stern voice. Slowly ... falteringly ... the six queens confessed what they had done. The king turned crimson with rage. "I'll have the lot of you beheaded!" he said.

"No, my Lord," said the seventh queen. "Don't do that. It was not their fault alone. When they told you that I had given birth to crabs, you should not have taken them at their word. It was such an unnatural happening! Was it not your duty to have enquired into it closely?"

"You are right," said the king shamefacedly. "It was my fault as much as theirs. A king has no right to be so gullible."

"Let us forget the past and be happy together again", said the youngest queen. "I have my eight children now. I am no longer afraid of anything or anyone."

Suddenly the entire garden was full of flowers again. The birds that had been silent all these days began to sing once more. And every one lived happily ever after including the six scheming queens.

